


LIVING RIVERSSM

CURRENTS

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RIVER GUIDES

For the Colorado River

In 1996 Colorado Plateau River Guides (CPRG) became one of the first organizations to publicly call for the decommissioning of Glen Canyon Dam. A fairly straightforward action most would assume, but in the complex realm of the river recreation industry, the action so far is unique.

In early days of river running, the river outfitting business was a small-scale seat-of-the-pants business. When dams were proposed, opposition was fierce, albeit not always successful. Lost revenue was certainly a concern, but there was clearly a passion for maintaining wild rivers. As the industry has matured, and the number of new dam proposals ground to near zero, advocacy in the river business has shifted more toward perceiving business opportunities, than for the river itself. For example, in the 1950s a task force of Western River Guides



Grand Canyon Guides call for draining Lake Powell

Association endeavored to stop construction of Glen Canyon Dam. That organization has since evolved into American Outdoors, the nation's leading trade association for outfitters. But despite nearly 100 organizations already on board with the decommissioning of Glen Canyon Dam, American Outdoors has yet to join on.

The guides, too, are often caught up in the business side of the culture. "Guides are generally so happy to be employed as river runners, they are often reluctant to become involved in advocating something their employers are not yet willing to support," says Annie Tueller-Payne, president of CPRG.

Nowhere is this better reflected than amongst the guides in Grand Canyon, whose ecosystem is being destroyed by Glen Canyon Dam. Now, six years after CPRG called for decommissioning, only 34 percent of the Grand Canyon guides believe there is enough information to support such a position.

Payne continues, "They've lost their beaches, the native fish are dying, and the rapids never change. Flows that once fluctuated from 4,000 to 90,000 cfs now fluctuate little beyond 8,000 to 20,000 cfs. Where is their environmental ethic? I guess more of our education needs to be directed down there."

Such advocacy work is now unprecedented in the guiding community. "No river industry group has ever provided such leadership in putting river resources first," says David Focardi, vice-president of CPRG. "We want to walk the talk. River guides have a captive audience of people who vote and guides need to capitalize on this. No other group has the ability to advance this campaign forward than do river guides. The guides need to know the issues about river ecosystems and how to protect them. They also must be able to answer the questions about ecosystem restoration and CPRG will be there to provide them with that information."

In May, LIVING RIVERS will be welcoming CPRG as one of our sponsored projects. You will be able to find information about their programs at <www.riverguides.org>. LIVING RIVERS will also be welcoming the formation of Wilderness River Runners, whose mission is to promote wilderness river corridors within the Colorado watershed. We're pleased to be supporting increased river advocacy within the river recreation industry and look forward to further partnerships like these that strengthen the movement to bring about the Colorado River's protection.

UNDAMMING

National Parks

A primary motive for decommissioning several dams on the Colorado River system is to restore habitat in some of the country's national parks and monuments. While concentrating on just a few of these dams, LIVING RIVERS has learned that there are a total of 742 dams affecting our parks—482 inside Park Service boundaries and another 260 outside.

"I'm not sure the public is fully aware of the number of dams in what are supposed to be protected natural areas," says LIVING RIVERS conservation director, John Weisheit. "The idea of dams is wholly inconsistent with the legislation which created our parks."

Few people see these dams, many of which are located away from the parking lots and paved roads. They are for the most part small and quite old, originally built for water supply or flood management purposes which are no longer critical. Many pose safety risks or are otherwise in disrepair. However, their removal could significantly improve the parks' natural integrity.

With the growing nationwide awareness of opportunities for river restoration through dam decommissioning, it's somewhat surprising that with the exception of a few high profile campaigns, many of these small dams that are ripe for removal have yet to be targeted. "We probably have 150 dams in the park system that we could take out right now, but there's no money available to remove them," says Charles Karpowicz with the National Park Service Maintenance and Operations Safety of Dams Program. The program does remove about four to five dams a year for safety reasons.

Even those dams that are arguably providing benefits, such as the sixty or so generating hydroelectricity, could be decommissioned as their output is relatively negligible. Such is the case on the Elwha River in Olympia National Park. Friends of the Earth is nearing the end of an 18-year effort to remove two dams. They've succeeded in getting the Park Service to purchase the dams for \$30 million, and within three years expect to see endangered salmon again thriving in natural habitat conditions.

"This is how our parks should be," says Shawn Cantrell who has spearheaded Friends of the Earth's Elwha campaign. "We should be eliminating dams like these that do not make sense." Cantrell would like to see the Park Service establish an objective of removing 25 percent of its dams within the next four to five years.

Greg Adair of Friends of Yosemite Valley agrees. "In 1923, the public suffered a major loss with the submergence of Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park, but this damage is not permanent and must be corrected," says Adair. Yosemite's O'Shaughnessy Dam is the most politically challenging facility to remove from the



Yosemite activists alert Hetch Hetchy visitors to the need for restoration

national park system. It is the largest, and like the dams on the Elwha, it is not owned by the Park Service. San Francisco operates it for water storage and generating \$30 million of hydropower revenue annually. "But this is public land, what John Muir described as 'More beautiful than Yosemite itself,' and the public and the ecosystem—deserves to have it back," adds Adair. Adair points out that San Francisco can store its water in neighboring reservoirs, and the power revenues represents a federal subsidy from the Park Service to San Francisco.

"Whether restoring Hetch Hetchy or a tributary stream on the Yellowstone, dams aren't needed and certainly don't belong in our National Parks. It's time we organized to bring this about," concludes Weisheit.

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MAKING THE GREEN RIVER WILD & FREE

Nearly fifty years ago, one of the most celebrated campaigns in the history of river advocacy began. The Sierra Club, Wilderness Society and the Izaak Walton League successfully fought to protect Dinosaur National Monument on the Green River from inundation by the proposed Echo Park and Split Mountain dams. Despite that victory two other dams were constructed above Dinosaur. This summer LIVING RIVERS will be ramping up efforts to eliminate these two dams to bring about one of the longest dam-free rivers in the continental United States.

As reported on previously in LIVING RIVERS *Currents*, the Bureau of Reclamation (BuRec) plans to release a draft environmental impact statement for its plans to alter the operations of the 502-foot-high Flaming Gorge Dam in an effort to correct the dam's impacts on endangered fish habitat in Dinosaur

Unfortunately, this was not a surprise. LIVING RIVERS had anticipated the need to be prepared to mobilize the legal resources to ensure this matter be properly addressed by the courts. Removing Flaming Gorge Dam alone, however, will not be enough to reestablish native fish habitat in Dinosaur National Monument, because a much smaller dam upstream of Flaming Gorge duplicates the problem. The 139-foot-high Fontenelle Dam must also be decommissioned. Its 29-mile reservoir stores only 1.3 percent the amount of water of the reservoirs behind Glen Canyon or Hoover dams, and its 10MW power generation represents slightly more than half that of the two dams currently being slated for decommissioning in Olympia National Park. Moreover, its earthen structure has been plagued with leaks since its completion. Therefore, advocating Fontenelle's removal will generate negligible controversy relative to Flaming Gorge upstream.



The Green River and Flaming Gorge before dams, 1922

National Monument downstream. We've recently learned that this document will be published in late summer, and despite the demands of LIVING RIVERS and the sixty environmental organizations which supported us, BuRec will not evaluate the decommissioning of this dam as one of its alternatives to achieve the necessary mitigation.

"The Bureau is violating the spirit of the National Environmental Policy Act," says Brian Dunkiel, staff attorney with Friends of the Earth. "Dam decommissioning is being supported by the Army Corps of Engineers, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and a number of state agencies as a means to recover endangered species. The Bureau has a legal obligation to consider this as a reasonable and scientifically defensible alternative for endangered fish recovery on the Green River."

"The Sierra Club et.al. succeeded in protecting Dinosaur National Monument from inundation a half century ago, but failed to prevent the slow death of its riverine habitat by dams upstream," says LIVING RIVERS executive director, Owen Lammers. "We hope, however, that the same nationwide enthusiasm and passion can again be mobilized on Dinosaur's behalf, leading to further success."

Lasting protection for Dinosaur National Monument is critical, but the removal of these two dams will also pave the way for re-opening discussions for a Green River National Park. This nearly 500-mile-long river corridor was proposed for protection prior to BuRec's interests in the Green River. Nearly all the land remains in the public trust; thus, establishing the nation's longest park would indeed be viable and a fitting testament to the work and vision of the environmental leaders of the past.



While activists begin organizing for the upcoming centennial celebration of the Bureau of Reclamation, on June 17, the agency itself has finally begun circulating information on its own plans. A letter circulated by Commissioner John Keys near the end of February did not elaborate on the details, but stated that events are being planned by regional and area offices throughout the 17 Western states that will span the twelve months between June 17, 2002 and June 17, 2003. According to the letter, the public is invited to participate. For information contact: Mr. Brit Storey, Reclamation Wide Centennial Committee, (303)445-2912, <bstorey@do.usbr.gov>. Although not noted in the letter, a coalition of water and power interests has been working to secure \$900,000 to aid in a major celebration at Hoover Dam on June 17, 2002. The event is to include "high-ranking" representatives of the Bush administration. It is unclear whether the public is invited to attend.

LIVING RIVERS is promoting a region-wide day of action for June 17, to ensure that the media and the general public are aware of the true impacts associated with the BuRec 100-year dismantling of the West's river corridors. Rallies, river memorials and candlelight vigils are some of the events being contemplated. For additional information contact LIVING RIVERS' Moab office.

"1%" Campaign Turns One

At just one year old, LIVING RIVERS' "1% for the Delta" campaign has grown some serious teeth. The campaign is now backed by a coalition of 133 groups representing 12 million people and has been the subject of over thirty television, radio and newspaper stories including the nationally broadcast News Hour with Jim Lehrer. The simplicity of the "1%" voluntary contribution from major Colorado River water users, equaling one percent of the river's flow to begin reviving the delta region, is what has made it so attractive.

At the prestigious Water Education Foundation meeting, held outside Santa Fe, New Mexico, the "1%" campaign was referenced repeatedly by speakers from across the country. All this interest has helped draw the attention of the Department of the Interior, which deemed the delta a top priority, yet is moving cautiously. It does support using U.S. technical assistance, but not the necessary contribution of U.S. water of even the tiniest proportion.

During the conference, Bennett Raley, Assistant Secretary of the Interior, met with LIVING RIVERS' Lisa Force and other environmental activists about reviving the dying delta. No agreements have been reached, but further discussions are planned when Raley and Force meet in Eugene, Oregon this month at the Land, Air and Water Conference sponsored by the University of Oregon Law School.



LR's Lisa Force with Assistant Secretary of the Interior, Bennett Raley

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